

Spacer use and care

What is a spacer?

A spacer is a tube or chamber that attaches to your puffer — a metered-dose inhaler (MDI). It makes it easier to breathe in your asthma medication and helps more of the medication reach your lungs.



The spacer connects to your puffer's mouthpiece and gives medication the 'space' to slow down so you can breathe it in slowly and deeply. The spacer holds the medication so you can take as many breaths as needed. This helps the medication get straight to where it's needed in your lungs, with less medication ending up in your mouth and throat where it can lead to irritation, hoarseness or infections. A spacer can also make it easier to coordinate pressing your puffer and breathing in.

Who should use a spacer?

The spacer helps the medication reach the small airways where it is most needed and this is important for both adults and children. Spacers should be used by:

- all children aged 4 years and under
- anyone taking a corticosteroid preventer medication (e.g. Flixotide, Symbicort) using an MDI/puffer
- anyone who has trouble coordinating the 'press and breathe' technique when using an MDI/puffer
- anyone taking a reliever medication (e.g. Ventolin) for asthma symptoms.

Why not use a nebuliser?

All the latest research shows that a puffer with spacer works just as well as a nebuliser for treating asthma symptoms, including during an asthma attack. A puffer with spacer is also simpler, cheaper and handier, is much more portable, and has fewer side-effects.

Do you need to use a mask with a spacer?

A small volume spacer with a tightly fitting face mask should be used for children younger than 4 years or for people who cannot close their lips tightly around the mouthpiece of a spacer.

A mask can also help people who have difficulty coordinating breaths. Some adults or children may find it difficult to coordinate pressing the puffer with taking a deep breath or may not be able to maintain a tight seal with the spacer mouthpiece.

Choosing a spacer

There are many different types, brands and sizes of spacers available including plastic chamber spacers, collapsible spacers and disposable cardboard spacers.

Ask your pharmacist, nurse or asthma educator about which spacer might be best for you or your child. Look for one that you can put together easily and that will be convenient to use.

Our [wall chart](#) that is designed for health professionals can also help you identify types of spacers.

Tips for using your spacer and puffer

- Before connecting the spacer and puffer, hold the puffer upright and shake well. (Not all MDI puffers need to be shaken – please read the instructions for your MDI puffer.)
- If it is the first time using your puffer, or if you haven't used it in a while, you will need to prime it before inserting it into the spacer. (Please read the instructions for your MDI puffer.)

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- Hold the puffer upright and insert it into the spacer.
- Put the spacer mouthpiece between your teeth without biting down and close your lips to form a tight seal.
- Keep the spacer horizontal and breathe out gently, into the spacer. Press down firmly on the puffer once only.
- Right after you press the canister, breathe in and out normally through the spacer for 4 breaths. (It is important to breathe in right away.)
- Alternatively, you can inhale slowly and deeply over 3 to 5 seconds. Hold your breath for 5 to 10 seconds before exhaling.

For more tips and to check you are using your spacer correctly, including how to use a mask with a spacer, view our [‘how-to video’ about inhaler and spacer use](#).

Cleaning your spacer

Clean your spacer weekly and after you have recovered from a cold or respiratory infection. Your spacer may become a bit cloudy over time, but it shouldn't be mouldy or brown. Your spacer should be replaced after 12 months of use or according to the manufacturer's instructions.

To clean your spacer:

- Dismantle your spacer, if necessary.
- Wash all the parts in clean warm water with liquid dishwashing detergent.
- Allow the parts to air dry without rinsing – drying with a cloth or paper towel can result in static building up on the inside of the spacer, which makes the medication stick to the sides.
- Wipe the mouthpiece clean of detergent, if needed.
- When completely dry, reassemble if necessary.

Please read the priming and cleaning instructions for your spacer or ask your pharmacist, nurse or asthma educator. Disposable cardboard spacers do not need to be primed or cleaned.



Your spacer should be checked by your pharmacist, nurse or asthma educator every 6 to 12 months to check the structure is intact (e.g. no cracks) and the valve is working properly.

View video on how to use an inhaler with a spacer for adults



View video on how to use an inhaler with a spacer for children



Download asthma action plans



View spacer wall chart



Disclaimer: It is important to note that information contained in this fact sheet is not intended to replace professional medical advice. Any questions regarding a medical diagnosis or treatment should be directed to a medical practitioner.